

Trevor Lwere  
University of Notre Dame  
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## **BEYOND ELECTORALISM: THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA**

### **Introduction**

Since the early 1990s, African states, on the prompting of both internal and external forces, have tended towards democratization. This shift was informed by a firm belief that democracy is good both intrinsically good and as an enabler of economic development. Yet, the circumstances under which the shift towards democratization in Africa was made has had significant implications for the conception, practice, and growth of democracy on the continent. In Africa, as elsewhere in the developing world, the third wave of democratization took root within a political, intellectual, and scholarly paradigm that privileged *procedural* democracy over *substantive* democracy. The staying power of this influence has proven so strong that the emphasis on *procedural* norms of democracy i.e., the *form* of democracy as opposed to the *substance* of democracy, continues to dominate the conversation on democracy in Africa. This paper contends that an inordinate focus on *procedural* norms of democracy—which often comes down to elections hence *electoralism* and ignores *substance*—encourages the emergence of a ruling class that obtains the mandate to govern through rightful means but governs without meaningful participation of the people. It also encourages the emergence of a narrow, exclusive, and formalized civil society that cannot effectively bridge the gap between the state and society. Together, these two features of *procedural* democracy in Africa undermine popular participation which in turn undermines democratic consolidation on the continent. The paper draws on the example of Ghana to illustrate this argument.

## Setting the stage for democratization in Africa

The essence of democracy is the pre-eminence of ‘the people’ as the supreme authority within a polity. In his seminal work, *Models of Democracy*, David Held, drawing on Aristotle, defines democracy as “a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule” (Held 1996, 1). In the ancient Greek city-state of Athens to which the origin of democracy is traced, democracy as a form of government consisted in the direct participation of qualified citizens in managing the public affairs of the city-state. The Athenian democracy, also referred to as the classical model of democracy, was underpinned by the principles of political equality and the rule of law (Held, 1996). The history of democracy is a complex one and, as political communities have grown more complex through population growth and territorial expansion, the meaning and practice of democracy have become ever more contentious. Held is apt in his summary of the historical debate on the meaning of democracy as 1) who qualifies as ‘the people’? 2) what should the scope of the ‘rule’ of the government be? and 3) how should said ‘rule’ be exercised? (Held 1996, 2). How a given society answers these questions has real implications for the nature of democracy that obtains in that society.

Scholarly debates have had a strong influence on the interpretation of democracy in various societies. As democratization took hold in Africa, scholarly debates raged on in the West about the meaning of democracy in the modern era. This debate pitted scholars and practitioners sympathetic to a classical understanding of democracy i.e., who define democracy by its *sources* and *purposes* against those who define democracy by the *procedures* that constitute democracy i.e., *procedural* democracy. Huntington, commenting on this debate, writes that “as a form of government, democracy been defined in terms of sources of authority for government, purposes served by government and procedures for constituting government” (Huntington 1996, 6).

Ultimately, the *procedural* camp prevailed. As Huntington notes, “by the 1970s the debate was over, and Schumpeter had won” (Huntington 1996, 6). (Schumpeter was the leading voice for the *proceduralists* in this debate.) Thus, democratization in Africa was set in motion against the backdrop of a world in which a *procedural* notion of democracy held ideological supremacy, an advantage compounded by the role of external actors in Africa’s transition to democracy. Jasper and Lord (2019) have argued that the [*procedural*] model of democracy was “promoted [in Africa] by the USA and other Western countries...through development aid and democracy advocacy civil society groups they funded” (Jasper & Lord, 2019). Informed by the prevailing thinking about democracy in the West, Western advocates of democratization in Africa sought to create a democratic African polity in the image of the Western liberal polity with emphasis on *procedural* norms of democracy as well as liberal values to underpin the political system.

### **Procedural democracy**

*Procedural* democracy emphasizes political participation, competition, and accountability, undergirded by liberal values (Schmitter and Karl, 2010). Joseph Schumpeter, arguably the foremost defender of the *procedural* notion of democracy, defined *procedural* democracy as “[an] institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote” (Schumpeter, 269). In *The Third Wave*, Samuel Huntington writes that “elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non” and that “a political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote” (Huntington 1996, 9). Schmitter and Karl (2010) define ‘modern political democracy’ as “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their

actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives”(2010: 4). They further assert that “what distinguishes democratic rulers from nondemocratic ones are the norms that condition how the former come to power and the practices that hold them accountable for their actions” (Ibid.). Thus, in the *procedural* conception of democracy, elections are central to democracy for two main reasons. First, elections are seen as the altar of democracy where the democratic process plays out i.e., political participation, competition, and accountability. Secondly, elections are important because they serve as a sieve for those who are qualified to hold public office. For proceduralists, managing public affairs requires special ability hence the need for elections to select qualified people. In addition to elections, *procedural* democracy also espouses liberal values, civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble, and organize that are necessary to political debate and the conduct of electoral campaigns” (1991: 7). *Liberalism* advocates the broadest possible array of individual rights and freedoms including human rights, civil liberties, freedoms including speech and association, private enterprise, and the competitive market economy as the central mechanisms for coordinating individuals’ interests, political equality, rule of law, all guaranteed by a constitutional state (Held 1996, 59). Yet, this emphasis on procedural norms i.e., elections and liberal values, while not unreasonable, does not necessarily translate into democracy, understood as *rule by the people*.

### **Participatory democracy**

Unlike procedural democracy which places emphasis on the norms and *form* of democracy, participatory democracy places emphasis on the *substance* of democracy. That is to say that participatory democracy seeks to actualize the empty promises of popular sovereignty that only hold formally in procedural democracy. According to Carole Pateman, liberal (*procedural*)

democracies are characterized by high levels of apathy and political disengagement (Pateman, 1970). This is because procedural democracy marginalizes citizens from meaningful participation in political life. As all political power is concentrated in the state, citizen power is only activated at regular intervals during election season, even as liberal democracy continues to proclaim the supremacy and sovereignty of the people. In other words, the people are only able to choose who governs them but do not participate in any meaningful way in how they are governed. Participatory democracy seeks to actualize this right by re-instating the people as the sovereign in the polity. It is important to note here that unlike procedural democracy that has a fixed form i.e., elections, participatory democracy takes a variety of forms. Because the emphasis is on the meaningful participation and actual sovereignty of the people, the question of form is secondary. The point is the substance, not the form. Therefore, in comparison, procedural democracy is an inferior form of democracy; it is a distortion of the essence of democracy in which the role of the *demos* is diminished to merely participating in elections i.e., selecting leaders.

### **Pitfalls of procedural democracy**

Under *procedural* democracy, the role of citizens is reduced to choosing leaders through elections. Huntington states that “governments produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, shortsighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by the public good. These qualities may make such governments undesirable, but they do not make them undemocratic” (Huntington 1991, 10). A notion of democracy could not be more minimalist. In a supposedly democratic polity, *the people*, who are supposed to be the supreme authority, are reduced to mere “producers of government,” in an exercise to select “the men who are able to do the deciding” (Held 1996, 149). Thus, proceduralists do not see a significant role for citizens—in whom democracy vests all power—beyond elections. As Jasper

and Lord (2019) argue, proceduralists view “the role of the voter as confined to accepting or refusing one “boss or another” (Jasper & lord, 5). As such, whereas citizens can choose who governs them, they do not really choose nor participate in how they are governed. In a word, *procedural* democracy is simply the overthrow of ‘the people’ as the sovereign power in the mobility.

The marginalization of the *demos* in the polity insulates politicians from popular pressures, which creates windows of opportunity for them to manipulate the political system to serve their own ends at the expense of the public good. The lack of meaningful participation of the masses in how they are governed drives a wedge between the state and society, ensuring that the ruling class can exercise power without much hand-waving from the *demos*. A self-interested ruling class with a vested interest in preserving such a power arrangement coalesces into a cartel that colludes implicitly to preserve the lop-sided power relation. Thus, politicians from this ruling class, which includes even opposition politicians, subject themselves to the electoral process as a means of obtaining power through legitimate means. Once in office, however, being fairly insulated from popular pressures due to the gap between the state and society, and owing to their control over the legislative agenda, they can manipulate the political system to serve their own interests without any hand-waving from a distant society. The state thus becomes a cocoon of individuals serving the interests of the ruling class which consists in both ruling party and opposition politicians who have an interest in the status quo. Where members of such a ruling class also form the strongest political parties, as is the case in Ghana, voters are left to just alternate between them. To be sure, the masses are not entirely removed from the political process. Indeed, in some competitive regimes, the ruling class responds to popular pressure, especially towards election season. Yet, the masses do not have effective

control over this ruling class, especially when it is made up of politicians from both ruling and opposition political parties as is the case in Ghana.

### **The Case of Ghana**

Ghana is often touted as the ‘shining star’ of democracy in Africa (Ware, 2020). Such praise, from both African and international observers is premised on Ghana’s commendable performance as a procedural democracy. Indeed, Ayee argues that “the transition from authoritarian to democratic system of government in Ghana and elsewhere in the world was informed and guided by the electoral model of democracy” (2017: 45). By this standard, Ghana is a model democracy. Since making the transition to democracy in 1992, Ghana has held seven successive elections widely considered to be free and fair. All these elections have been characterized by stiff competition between the two dominant political parties—the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC)—and three of these elections have resulted in a peaceful transfer of power between these two parties (Paller, 2019). Moreover, Ghana has also successfully institutionalized most of its electoral and governance processes (ibid.). Thus, what Ghana has demonstrated is a mastery of the procedural *form* of democracy. Freedom House ranks Ghana as one of a handful of “free” countries in Africa, a ranking based on presence of political rights and civil liberties. Under political rights, Freedom House considers factors such as the electoral process, political pluralism and functioning of government. Civil liberties are measured in terms of freedom of expression, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights (Freedom House, 2020). These indicators are the hallmark of a *procedural* democracy; they capture the emphasis on elections and liberal values.

Yet, while Ghana exhibits the tenets of procedural democracy, it is also emblematic of its shortcomings. In his book, ‘Democracy in Ghana’, Jeffrey W. Paller captures this paradox.

He writes that

*Ghana is one of Africa's most successful democracies. It holds free and fair elections, has experienced multiple turnovers of power, and hosts an unrestricted press and independent judiciary...Yet, this formal institutional progress coincides with nondemocratic developments, including the persistence of political clientelism, the capture of public goods for private gain, and the sustenance of ethnic politics. This prompts a puzzling question; why do these nondemocratic elements endure the strengthening of liberal democratic institutions?*

(Paller, ix)

Paller's observation of democracy in Ghana draws our attention to a feature all too common in liberal democracies: the existence of excesses of power side by side with democratic norms and institutions. Whereas Paller attributes this phenomenon to the politics of urbanization that encourages clientelism, corruption and abuse of power, I contend that this is in fact the consequence of procedural democracy (Paller, 2019). Ghanaians live on the fringes of the polity with little or no meaningful participation in political life outside periodic elections. Whereas Ghanaians do choose their leaders in regular elections largely considered to be free and fair, they neither choose nor participate meaningfully in how they are governed. Therefore, the state in Ghana is effectively insulated from popular pressure. Moreover, Ghana's procedural democracy has also encouraged the emergence of a cartelized and manipulative ruling class and a weak civil society that cannot effectively bridge the gap between the state and society which has further undermined democratic consolidation in the country.

### **The ruling class as a cartel in Ghana**

Ghana's ruling class i.e., the two leading parties—the ruling NPP and the opposition NDC—agree on the current political arrangement. While they engage in stiff competition for political power as was the case in the recent hotly contested 2020 presidential elections, both parties seem



to be in tacit agreement on the rules of the game i.e., the current configuration of the state-society relations where the ruling class regardless of party holds power while maintaining the lop-sided power relations vis-à-vis the citizens who are almost passive spectators only activated every four years during election time. Therefore, as both parties recognize the demobilization of the *demos* to be to their advantage, electoral competition is not a sufficient incentive for either party to govern with meaningful participation of the masses. Rather, whoever emerges victorious from the fight for power proceeds to exercise it within the conventional framework that allows them to manipulate the rules of the game without much handwaving from the *demos*. In this way, the dominant political groups in Ghana i.e., the NPP and the NDC act as a cartel insofar as they tacitly agree on a status quo that empowers them at the expense of the citizens. In liberal democracies such as Ghana, changing this balance of power would require legislation for which citizens must rely on their elected leaders. Yet, because most of the contestants are from the two leading parties have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, they have no incentive to change this arrangement. Moreover, anti-establishment candidates who try to challenge the status quo may lack the resources and public visibility if they come from smaller parties not to mention that ‘third-way’ candidates cannot easily obtain a majority in the legislature for similar reasons. The other way that Ghanaians could change the status quo in a liberal democratic arrangement is through civil society which, as I argue in the next section, has also been effectively handicapped under Ghana’s procedural democracy. Furthermore, electoral competition fails to be a strong incentive because citizens’ psyche has been conditioned (through media and other means) such that they perceive this limited form of democracy as democracy par excellence. I refer to this as the hubris of democracy. I return to this point later in the paper. In effect, therefore, Ghanaians are left to choose between two similar options—NPP or NDC—which maintain a system that

estranges citizens from power and insulates politicians from popular pressure.

The consequence of this effective insulation of the state from popular pressure is that it breeds the tendency toward nepotism, corruption and clientelism even in an apparently democratic regime like Ghana, as Paller observes (Paller, 2019). In Ghana, this has been the case whether it is the NPP or the NDC in power. Whenever they've had their turn in power, each party has exhibited a tendency towards manipulating the political system to serve their interests. For instance, both parties have historically deployed party cadres and loyalists often as a reward for their efforts in securing electoral victory. Ayee (2019) notes that the public administrators in Ghana's civil service have openly identified and even contested elections for political office on the ticket of one of the two leading parties. He argues that "rather than service to the public, public administrators have become servants to the party in power, which means doing what the political head tells them to do—most of which is often driven by parochial political interests—rather than doing what is technically and professionally required to deliver essential services to the public" (Ayee, 51). This is true not only in bureaucratic positions but also in other pillars of the state, notably the security forces. Jasper and Lord observe that "even [Ghana's] security agencies have been politicized, with the cream of the officer corps in the Ghana Armed Forces, Ghana Police Service, Ghana Prison Service, Ghana Fire Service, Ghana Immigration Service, and other security and intelligence organs of the state increasingly divided along NDC/ NPP lines" (Jasper & Lord 2019, 9). Paller (2019) argues that this behavior is in response to the various incentives that politicians face. That is to say that politicians seeking to form winning alliances must appease certain sections of the public to earn their support. If this is true, it simply proves that politicians have effective control over the state vis-à-vis a disenfranchised citizenry and therefore they (politicians) can afford to use the state as they wish, including for clientelism. I argue that in the

presence of meaningful political participation, such practices would be curtailed as citizens, be directly involved in the running of public affairs, would not tolerate the wastage of public resources in rent-seeking activities. Therefore, contrary Paller's argument, clientelism is a product of procedural democracy. Politicians can engage in rent-seeking behavior because citizens are unable to hold them accountable in the current political set-up.

### **A crippled civil society**

Another unfortunate consequence of *procedural* democracy in Ghana has been the crippling of civil society which is supposed to bridge the gap between the state and society. I use civil society to refer to professionalized civil society that has access to the power centers in the country. Schmitter and Karl argue that democracy "offers a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interests and values---associational as well as partisan, functional as well as territorial, collective as well as individual. All are integral to its practice" (Schmitter and Karl 2010, 6). They further state that "during the intervals between elections, citizens can seek to influence public policy through a wide variety of other intermediaries: interest associations, social movements, locality groupings, clientelist arrangements, and so forth". Indeed, civil society played a prominent role in Africa's transition to democracy. Gyimah-Boadi writes that "among the forces that dislodged entrenched authoritarianism in Africa and brought about the beginnings of formal democracy in the early 1990s, the continent's nascent civil societies were in the forefront" (Gyimah-Boadi 1996, 118). Yet, following the transition to democracy, civil society took on a new form and assumed new obligations that had the consequences of undermining the growth and consolidation of democracy. Schmitter and Karl argue that "at its best, civil society provides an intermediate layer of governance between the individual and the state that is capable of resolving conflicts and controlling the behavior of members without

public coercion (Schmitter and Karl, 1991). Yet, *procedural* democracy weakens the link between the state and society by encouraging the emergence of a narrow, exclusive, and formalized civil society that is ineffective in bridging the gap between the state and society. I argue that this is the case in Ghana.

In a *procedural* democracy like Ghana's, civil society assumes the role of a watchdog over the democratic *process*. This role is meant to ensure compliance with the norms and form of *procedural* democracy i.e., a focus on the *form* rather than the substance of democracy. In other words, civil society is preoccupied with ensuring that the norms of a *procedural* democracy are practiced well. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) carve out niches in the democratic process for their focus and consequently, civil society tends towards specialization, exclusion, and formalization.

Playing the watchdog role in a *procedural* democracy is an expensive venture that has forced CSOs in Ghana to turn to and become heavily reliant on foreign funding. Consequently, their issue agendas are defined not by the public for which they purport to speak but by the considerations of the donors who support their work. Thus, CSOs in Ghana are specialized in a narrow set of issues which does not necessarily reflect concerns of the ordinary Ghanaians. According to a GIZ report, "Ghanaian CSOs work in four main categories: service delivery, advocacy, watchdog roles and as collaborative partners with government, engaged in research and planning related to national development" (GIZ 2013). Issues that do not fit the donor agenda are left unattended to, regardless of their significance to the ordinary folk. In addition to their issue bias, CSOs in Ghana also have a narrow geographical focus. Krawczyk (2020) observes that "CSOs are not evenly distributed across the 10 regions of Ghana with about half of the total CSOs that registered from 2000-2012 located in the capital Accra with

significantly fewer CSOs in the more rural and northern regions of Ghana”<sup>1</sup>. This is partly a consequence of the narrow geographical focus as well as narrow issue focus that is shaped by donor preferences. This has significantly eroded the ability of civil society to speak for the masses especially in the face of a detached state and cartelized ruling class as shown earlier.

Specialization breeds formalization. As CSOs narrow their focus to specific issues, their work requires unique specialized skills like research, litigation etc. Krawczyk (2020) observes that “Ghanaian CSOs are especially successful in the research and advocacy space, particularly when it comes to constitutional, legislative, and judicial reform, government effectiveness, voice and accountability, and anti-corruption. Legislation proposed and drafted by CSOs has in some cases been adopted and passed into law”<sup>2</sup>. To perform these specialized tasks, Ghanaian CSOs enlist professional members who possess the required skills. In so doing, CSOs morph into an exclusive club. As Krawczyk (2020) further observes, “increasingly [in Ghana], there is an emphasis on formal, professionalized CSOs, coupled with a de-emphasis on and decline of grassroots, informal CBOs. This is part due to donors’ conception of civil society, which is narrow and includes mainly professional, urban CSOs”. According to a 2018 Afrobarometer survey in Ghana, 67% of respondents did not identify as members of a voluntary association or community group. As their membership becomes skewed against certain sections of society, especially the rural poor who, according to the World Bank, constitute a significant percentage of Ghana’s population, the legitimacy of CSOs to speak for or represent *the people* is vastly eroded. Taken together, therefore, a narrow issue and geographical focus coupled with formalization by NGOs significantly erodes their ability to effectively bridge the gap between the state and society. As Diamond, Plattner and Chu note in their work on civil society in Africa, “the ability of civil society to help deepen democratic governance and put it beyond reversal remains in serious doubt.

Overall, civil society is too weak to tilt state-society relations in favor of the latter. Despite the return to formal democracy and the promulgation of constitutions with all the usual checks and balances, officials retain enormous power” (1997: 280). More importantly, the specialized and exclusive nature of CSOs in a *procedural* democracy like Ghana means that the masses are left on their own with no one to speak for them. In a participatory democracy where citizens take part actively and meaningfully in the running of public affairs, public concerns would be at the forefront of government agenda as citizens would directly define their interests at all levels as opposed to having external actors define the interests of a few groups within the polity and in mostly urban areas.

### **Captured civil society**

The absence of a broad, inclusive, and effective civil society has given way to the leading political parties to further manipulate the system by expanding their writ into the civil society space. Jasper and Lord argue that “these parties have appropriated the terrain for “civil society” particularly when out of power and in political opposition” (2019: 18). Krawczyk (2020) also observes that “although the majority of civil society strives to be non-partisan, there is a growing perception that some CSOs are political, especially those CSOs working in anti-corruption and governance”<sup>3</sup>. She further states that “there is also an emerging fifth CSO classification known as partisan CSOs or political pressure groups, which are informal extensions of political parties and interests, and which have proven to be controversial” (Krawczyk, 2020)<sup>4</sup>. Examples include the Committee of Joint Action (CJA) which was spearheaded by the NDC while it was out of power between 2001 and 2009. The NPP-affiliated Alliance for Accountable Governance (AFAG) was founded as a platform for popular resistance against the NDC between 2009 and 2017 when NPP was in opposition. Jasper and Lord argue that “these [partisan and] elitist CSOs turn out to dominate and

shape the public discourse and influence public policy” (2019: 18). They cite an instance in 2017 where the NPP-led government was forced to withdraw three major policy initiatives owing to pressure by the partisan and elitist CSOs who would have been impacted by these policies. Extension of political parties into the civil society is both an indication of the weakness of civil society in Ghana as well as the cartel-like behavior of Ghana’s political class to further erode popular sovereignty. Meanwhile, Ghanaians are left on their own with seemingly only one option to make their voices heard in this system: protest.

### **Hubris of proceduralism**

According to Afrobarometer data, Ghanaians are unlikely to protest or to seek extra-institutional channels to air their discontent with their leaders or to seek to participate in how they are governed. I argue that this is the effect of what I call the *hubris of proceduralism*; the idea that *procedural* democracy is the ultimate form of democracy and thus an unwillingness to challenge it. When *procedural* democracy is sold as the ultimate form of democracy, the ability of citizens to imagine an alternative conception of democracy that could perhaps better serve their needs is stunted. This is the situation obtaining in Ghana today.

Whereas Ghanaians have legitimate grievances against their leaders, they do not seem to be discontent with the current state of their democracy as most are unlikely to protest. According to a 2016/18 Afrobarometer survey in Ghana, 75 percent of respondents thought that their members of parliament never listen to them or only listen to them sometimes. Fifty percent believed that the ability of MPs to listen to what ordinary people had to say had not changed from a few years ago. Fifty-two percent of respondents approved of the performance of their Members of Parliament (MPs) while 34 percent did not approve, and 13 percent simply did not know. Fifty-four percent indicated that their present living conditions were bad. 60 percent believed that it is highly unlikely

for them to access the local government budget and development plan and 71% never contact their local government councilor. Yet, for all these concerns with the system, 80 percent of respondents were either 'fairly satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with democracy in Ghana. And whereas 58% percent of respondents believe that it is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, only 10% of respondents had joined others to raise an issue, 43% had never joined others to raise but would do so if they had a chance and 23% would never join others to raise an issue. This is confounding especially as majority of the respondents expressed a concern with their leaders in the same survey. Moreover, 67 percent of respondents would never join a demonstration or protest march and only 25% have never but would do so if they had a chance. What explains this paradox? Why are Ghanaians discontent with their leaders yet seem to be satisfied with their democracy? This is even more puzzling when one considers the absence of an effective civil society to mediate state-society relations. Jasper and Lord (2019), citing the emergence of vigilante groups in Ghanaian politics argue that some Ghanaians now seek to join the state to share in the 'national cake'. This explanation does not account for most ordinary Ghanaians who are not associated with vigilante groups or are active members of political parties but have genuine concerns. One other plausible explanation is that Ghanaians are willing to trade political agency for socioeconomic wellbeing. Over the last 15 years Ghana has registered impressive economic growth under both the NPP and NDC governments, becoming a lower middle-income country in 2007<sup>5</sup>. I hypothesize that because their living standards are improving, it could be the case that Ghanaians are willing to trade some political agency for improved socioeconomic well-being. However, I argue that a better explanation for this paradox, that is, the paradox of Ghanaians concern with their leaders on the one hand and an apparent satisfaction with their form of democracy on the other is the *hubris of proceduralism*. That is to say that



Ghanaians have not mobilized outside formal political structures to tilt the balance of power against the state because their psyche has been conditioned (through media and other means) such that they now perceive this limited form of democracy, *procedural* democracy, as democracy par excellence. Under a liberal world order, procedural/liberal democracy has been sold far and wide as the ultimate form of democracy. This is evidenced by the obsession of international actors with recommending organizing of elections to resolve political impasses in conflict ridden states especially in Africa. Yet, from South Sudan to Libya, Liberia to Sierra Leone, the effectiveness of elections alone has been limited at best. This hubris of proceduralism amongst citizens i.e., the belief that *procedural* democracy is the ultimate form of democracy and that the ritualistic performance of procedural norms such as elections constitutes democracy makes citizens to feel a false sense of confidence in the system. Yet, in essence, they (citizens) are powerless. The effect of such romanticization of *procedural* democracy is that it limits the ability of citizens to imagine alternative conceptions of democracy that could perhaps serve their needs better. I find this a more plausible explanation for the paradox of why Ghanaians are discontent with their leaders but report to be content with their form of democracy. To further illustrate the effect of the *hubris of proceduralism*, I draw parallels between Ghana and her neighbor to the North, Burkina Faso.

The character of civil society in Burkina Faso is quite different from that of civil society in Ghana. In Burkina Faso, civil society is restive and generally politically engaged. The Burkinabé are in the vanguard of defending their rights and protecting their growing democracy. Yet, whenever they register a political win, they always defer to the elites or the military. For instance, following the overthrow of Blaise Compaoré in 2014, ordinary folk who made this happen ceded power to the old guard i.e., they allowed Compaoré's former colleagues to constitute the new

government (Andrews & Honig, 2019). Following a botched coup attempt in 2015, ordinary folk who successfully resisted the overthrow of the transitional government once again ceded power but this time to the military to form a transitional government. It is striking how much faith the Burkinabé have in the elite and the military despite being disappointed by them on almost all occasions (Andrews & Honig, 2019). I argue that just like the Ghanaians, the Burkinabé too suffer from the *hubris of proceduralism*. Ordinary Burkinabé are convinced that the best *form* of democracy is *procedural* democracy. As such, every time they cause momentous change, they quickly cede to the ‘experts’ of *procedural* democracy who happen to be the very elite and military personnel that have failed them time and again. One plausible explanation for this unyielding faith in the elite and the military is a constrained power of imagination amongst the population which I contend is the effect of a faith in proceduralism i.e., the *hubris of proceduralism*. In some cases, this could be a problem of lack of capacity and proper organization on the part of the masses. As we have seen with the wave of youth uprisings in Burkina Faso and elsewhere on the African continent since the Arab Spring in 2011, young people overturn things only to leave them the same. Proper organization would seek to go beyond political mobilization and toward political organization for the sake of taking political power. Perhaps young people are unwilling to explore alternative approaches or to consolidate their wins on the battlefield because they are handicapped in various ways; ideologically, financially et cetera. Yet, while this could be a case of lack of proper political organization on the part of the masses, I argue that it has more to do with what they see as their role in the polity and what their collective conception of democracy and their role in it is. Like Ghanaians, Burkinabé see their role as simply selecting leaders and because they do not see themselves as potential ‘bosses’, they easily cede their victories after overthrowing bad governments.

Whereas both Ghanaians and Burkinabé suffer the *hubris of proceduralism*; they do so differently. For the Burkinabé, it is suffered in an aspirational sense, for the Ghanaians in an actualized sense. Both groups romanticize *procedural* democracy. Yet, because Ghanaians have achieved it, they see their role in the polity as reduced to selecting leaders. They don't need to protest to bring it about because they have it already. On their part, the Burkinabé, because they are yet to establish a stable *procedural* democracy to which they aspire, see their role as working to achieve this *form* of democracy i.e., procedural democracy whether through elections or protests. It is therefore not be a surprise that every time they accomplish either of these tasks, they hand their power back to those who they believe are better placed to exercise it, even if they are the very same people in the first place. Despite these differences, both Ghanaians and Burkinabé do not see themselves as being potential 'bosses' of themselves because *procedural* democracy has impressed upon them a narrow role as citizens, that of merely selecting leaders. Thus, they both defer to a ruling class as their ability to imagine an alternative conception of democracy is limited.

This paper has argued that *procedural* democracy i.e., an inordinate emphasis on the *form* rather than the *substance* of democracy undermines democratic consolidation through estrangement of the masses—who are meant to be the sovereign in a democracy—from power. This alienation of the masses encourages the emergence of a cartelized and manipulative ruling class and a narrow, exclusive, and formalized civil society that cannot effectively bridge the gap between state and society. The paper has drawn on the example of Ghana to illustrate the pitfalls of *procedural* democracy. Whereas Ghana is touted as a model democracy in Africa, the limited opportunities for citizens to participate in the political life of the polity has handicapped democratic consolidation in Ghana.

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